THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

The Employee Assistance Program to help you manage your most valuable resource – Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260   Seattle (206) 281-6315   Spokane (509) 482-3686
Website: http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html

Q. Every summer I have an employee who skips out of work to go fishing. He doesn't call in; he just doesn't show up. Trust me, there is no personal problem. He just doesn't care about what I think. Should I just deal with this as a disciplinary matter?

A. Assuming you are correct, and your employee is off work fishing without calling in or caring about what you think, a personal problem does exist. His behavior is unacceptable. This makes an EAS referral appropriate. Your supervisor referral should be based upon the documented evidence of the attendance issues and his not following proper procedures when taking leave. You must communicate with your employee that you will not accept his behavior, and back it up with consequences you believe are appropriate. A supervisor referral to EAS prior to taking disciplinary action may permit the EA professional to discover and help him deal with any personal problems that help perpetuate this behavior. The value of EAS is in helping this employee to change so you don't have to lose him as a result of his absenteeism.

Q. I have an employee who consistently criticizes decisions or recommendations that I make to the work group. Publicly, I ignore these criticisms, but later stew in private. What can I do, and how do I involve EAS in managing this behavior?

A. Although constructive criticism and debate about ideas should be something you encourage among employees, an employee who habitually and publicly finds fault and points out unfavorable aspects of your decisions negatively affects the work unit. This behavior undermines your leadership role - your ability to direct others and influence thoughts, opinions, and behavior. An employee who habitually disagrees with you should discuss his or her differences in private, as you would in a corrective interview. Meet with your employee and describe the unacceptable behavior, but acknowledge your willingness to accept feedback. Express the negative impact of the public criticism on the work unit and specify the changes you require. Asking your employee to bring disagreements to you privately may reduce them because it removes the motivation to demonstrate aggression through criticism in a public way. Consider a referral to EAS and consequences for his or her failure to change.

Q. What are some of the most important ways Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are beneficial to organizations? Are they costly?

A. Considerable research exists to demonstrate the cost-benefit of EAPs in reducing absenteeism and employee turnover, improving morale, and saving on healthcare costs. However, many other areas remain under researched, particularly workers compensation and property casualty loss prevention. Perhaps one of the most financially rewarding benefits of EAPs is their role in helping troubled employees resolve personal problems that contribute to volatile and problematic relationships with management. To the extent that troubled employees can identify and resolve personal problems that affect the quality of their relationships with management, the risks of lawsuits and other employment claims are reduced. Undoubtedly, nationwide this EAP work saves employers millions of dollars. EAPs help employees get their needs met in the most effective ways while steering them toward practical solutions and away from options that will contribute to loss of employment and financial loss to the organization.

■ Q. I told employees they can no longer use sick leave for vacation time. Most are upset because the last supervisor permitted this practice. Many have doubled their annual vacation time as a result. Should I confront abusers of sick leave and refer them to EAS?

A. Your employees have grown accustomed to additional time off and they are naturally reluctant to give it up. As a result, your decision may cause morale problems because employees feel entitled to that additional time off. Check your agency policy and any bargaining agreements that may apply to this issue. Get support from management for your plan to resolve this problem. This is important, because morale problems associated with the crisis could later be attributed to you alone. Together with management you can resolve it, but a clear and decisive stand will be needed. You should use EAS to manage employees who test the organization's resolve to appropriately stop this practice. Some may need more support with respect to anger and coping with the reduced "benefit" they no longer enjoy. Use EAS anytime to help employees face the loss of resources or benefits that once made their lives easier.

■ Q. I have an employee who is frequently late to work in the morning because she moonlights until late at night. I have warned her repeatedly, but it has not helped. I can't see the EAS role in this problem.

A. Like many performance and attendance problems, it may at first appear that EAS can't do much, but this is often not the case. Your employee's tardiness and failure to correct it make an EAP referral appropriate. If she accepts the referral, an EA professional may discover issues that lead to a solution. These could include dealing with financial problems that force her to work an extra job, making changes in her moonlighting schedule, finding a different part-time job, resolving denial associated with her tardiness and its consequences, identifying interventions to prevent tardiness, and discovering techniques for getting to work on time.

NOTES:

Visit EAS on our website at:
http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html

Washington State Department of
Personnel